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Diagnosis and Treatment of Disease

Illness was believed to be caused primarily by witchcraft and, secondarily, by the breaking of a taboo or by contagion. Headaches, bloated stomach (*pihl*) and stomach aches were among the common symptoms of bewitchment. The tremendous fear of black magic probably added greatly to the severity of these afflictions. During Quain's stay the women appeared to complain more of sorcery as a cause of their illnesses than did the men, but this self-diagnosis was not always accepted.

Trumaí concepts regarding contagion were generally loose, and they often fused with witchcraft beliefs. Contagion was acknowledged to be a possible cause of illness, but if death followed, it would in all probability be laid to sorcery. The Trumaí knew that epidemics of pulmonary diseases were associated with the coming of white men, and they were especially worried that when the rainy season arrived Quain would give them coughs and fevers. Indeed, one night when Quain complained of illness and retired to his hammock with a headache, this eventuality was vigorously discussed.

The Trumaí called such a threat *tun*, a word that can be translated only as a malignant influence causing disease. *Tun* was said to exist around sick people or in places where there was known to be danger of contamination. Thus, when several of the people of Jakwanari's household were sick, everyone avoided the house, for it was full of *tun*. Aloari said that the waterfront, also, was full of *tun*. He preferred to bathe from a pottery vessel outside his house. Ringworm, however, was known to be caused by natural means.

The word *okei*, while referring to sorcery under certain conditions, was also a general term for medicinal preparations. Thus, *okei* of various kinds were used in different stages of the life crisis rituals and also in the treatment of various ailments. Roots were extensively used for medicinal purposes. Maibu rubbed his wife's head with the extract of a root (*ipox*) when she had a headache. Another root (*murukuyu*) supplied the basic ingredient for eye drops, and still another was prescribed for ringworm.

The Trumaí were subject to severe boils which were treated by piercing. This was a woman's specialty, and it was usually done by the wife or a close relative of the afflicted person. All other curing, both secular and supernatural, was done by men. Herbal medicines were used exclusively for such ailments as ringworm, but most cures involved both botanical and supernatural means used in conjunction.

Illness was treated by both individual curers and group ceremonies. The practice of individual shamanistic curing, known as *jau'kath*, had much in common with similar arts throughout South America. The main techniques employed were tobacco smoke and sucking. Great

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clouds of tobacco smoke were first blown over the affected area by the curer who then, with noisy inhalations, sucked that part of the body in which the ailment appeared to be localized. Insofar as Quain was able to determine, no foreign objects were "extracted," and he was not given any explanation as to why the treatment worked.

Knowledge of curing was widespread among the men. All the men knew how to use botanicals, and over half, all said to have been taught by Matiwana, knew the art of *jau'kath*. Men cured their wives, children, or other close blood relatives. When Aloari was treating his son's ringworm he was asked by Quain whether he would also treat a young boy who was only indirectly related. Aloari refused because the boy had closer kinsmen who could perform this act. Kayaru developed a swollen breast, and it was Yanahi, her sister's son, who performed *jau'kath* on it. All men treated the members of their biological families with medicines, but those who did not know the shamanistic cure relied on a practitioner from outside the immediate family.

Matiwana treated his son Yati without recompense, but when his daughter's husband became ill, the latter paid him for the cure with a pot. The kinship ties by which curing was free to certain relatives probably corresponded closely to the pattern of gift-giving obligations. Payments for medical treatment were called *okei pop* (medicine gift). Quain was usually given small payments for the many cures he performed for the Trumaí. In no case could it be said that any curer derived a significant income from his services.

Group Curing Ceremony

The only time that Quain witnessed the group curing ceremony (*kevere*) was on an occasion two weeks after his arrival. He noted the formal aspects carefully, but he was unable to ascertain their meanings, since his command of the language at that time was so meagre.

Maibu's wife, Matavitsa, was sick and wasted when Quain arrived in the village. Her husband had been treating her for some time by the shamanistic means of tobacco smoke and sucking, but with little success. It was decided to hold a ceremonial cure, although shamanistic techniques were not ruled out. Nearly all the adult men of the village gathered in Maibu's house for the ritual, which lasted for three hours. No women were admitted, and the door was kept closed. The *kevere* was strictly prohibited to females, and the men would not even talk of it in their presence. The women seemed to regard Quain's status as doubtful, for Maibu's sister told him that he would die if he entered. He refused to be dissuaded, and upon entering was motioned to a seat.

The men were ranged in a broad semi-circle along the side of the house opposite the sick woman's hammock. Matiwana, who was in charge of